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Playboy Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono:
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PLAYBOY: "The word is out: John Lennon and Yoko Ono are back in the studio, recording again for the first time since 1975, when they vanished from public view. Let's start with you, John. What have you been doing?"

LENNON: "I've been baking bread and looking after the baby."

PLAYBOY: "With what secret projects going on in the basement?"

LENNON: "That's like what everyone else who has asked me that question over the last few years says. 'But what else have you been doing?' To which I say, 'Are you kidding?' Because bread and babies, as every housewife knows, is a full-time job. After I made the loaves, I felt like I had conquered something. But as I watched the bread being eaten, I thought, Well, Jesus, don't I get a gold record or knighted or nothing?"

PLAYBOY: "Why did you become a househusband?"

LENNON: "There were many reasons. I had been under obligation or contract from the time I was 22 until well into my 30s. After all those years, it was all I knew. I wasn't free. I was boxed in. My contract was the physical manifestation of being in prison. It was more important to face myself and face that reality than to continue a life of rock 'n' roll... and to go up and down with the whims of either your own performance or the public's opinion of you. Rock 'n' roll was not fun anymore. I chose not to take the standard options in my business... going to Vegas and singing your great hits, if you're lucky, or going to hell, which is where Elvis went."

ONO: "John was like an artist who is very good at drawing circles. He sticks to that and it becomes his label. He has a gallery to promote that. And the next year, he will do triangles or something. It doesn't reflect his life at all. When you continue doing the same thing for ten years, you get a prize for having done it."

LENNON: "You get the big prize when you get cancer and you have been drawing circles and triangles for ten years. I had become a craftsman and I could have continued being a craftsman. I respect craftsmen, but I am not interested in becoming one."

ONO: "Just to prove that you can go on dishing out things."

PLAYBOY: "You're talking about records, of course."

LENNON: "Yeah, to churn them out because I was expected to, like so many people who put out an album every six months because they're supposed to."

PLAYBOY: "Would you be referring to Paul McCartney?"

LENNON: "Not only Paul. But I had lost the initial freedom of the artist by becoming enslaved to the image of what the artist is supposed to do. A lot of artists kill themselves because of it, whether it is through drink, like Dylan Thomas, or through insanity, like Van Gogh, or through V.D., like Gauguin."

PLAYBOY: "Most people would have continued to churn out the product. How were you able to see a way out?"

LENNON: "Most people don't live with Yoko Ono."

PLAYBOY: "Which means?"

LENNON: "Most people don't have a companion who will tell the truth and refuse to live with a bullshit artist, which I am pretty good at. I can bullshit myself and everybody around. Yoko: That's my answer."

PLAYBOY: "What did she do for you?"

LENNON: "She showed me the possibility of the alternative. 'You don't have to do this.' 'I don't? Really? But-but-but-but-but...' Of course, it wasn't that simple and it didn't sink in overnight. It took constant reinforcement. Walking away is much harder than carrying on. I've done both. On demand and on schedule, I had turned out records from 1962 to 1975. Walking away seemed like what the guys go through at 65, when suddenly they're supposed

to not exist anymore and they're sent out of the office..." (knocks on the desk three times) "'Your life is over. Time for golf.'"

PLAYBOY: "Yoko, how did you feel about John's becoming a househusband?"

ONO: "When John and I would go out, people would come up and say, 'John, what are you doing?' but they never asked about me, because, as a woman, I wasn't supposed to be doing anything."

LENNON: "When I was cleaning the cat shit and feeding Sean, she was sitting in rooms full of smoke with men in three-piece suits that they couldn't button."

ONO: "I handled the business: old business... Apple, Maclen," (the Beatles' record company and publishing company, respectively) "and new investments."

LENNON: "We had to face the business. It was either another case of asking some daddy to come solve our business or having one of us do it. Those lawyers were getting a quarter of a million dollars a year to sit around a table and eat salmon at the Plaza. Most of them didn't seem interested in solving the problems. Every lawyer had a lawyer. Each Beatle had four or five people working. So we felt we had to look after that side of the business and get rid of it and deal with it before we could start dealing with our own life. And the only one of us who has the talent or the ability to deal with it on that level is Yoko."

PLAYBOY: "Did you have experience handling business matters of that proportion?"

ONO: "I learned. The law is not a mystery to me anymore. Politicians are not a mystery to me. I'm not scared of all that establishment anymore. At first, my own accountant and my own lawyer could not deal with the fact that I was telling them what to do."

LENNON: "There was a bit of an attitude that this is John's wife, but surely she can't really be representing him."

ONO: "A lawyer would send a letter to the directors, but instead of sending it to me, he would send it to John or send it to my lawyer. You'd be surprised how much insult I took from them initially. There was all this 'But you don't know anything about law; I can't talk to you.' I said, 'All right, talk to me in the way I can understand it. I am a director, too.'"

LENNON: "They can't stand it. But they have to stand it, because she is who represents us." (chuckles) "They're all male,

you know, just big and fat, vodka lunch, shouting males, like trained dogs, trained to attack all the time. Recently, she made it possible for us to earn a large sum of money that benefited all of them and they fought and fought not to let her do it, because it was her idea and she was a woman and she was not a professional. But she did it, and then one of the guys said to her, 'Well, Lennon does it again.' But Lennon didn't have anything to do with it."

PLAYBOY: "Why are you returning to the studio and public life?"

LENNON: "You breathe in and you breathe out. We feel like doing it and we have something to say. Also, Yoko and I attempted a few times to make music together, but that was a long time ago and people still had the idea that the Beatles were some kind of sacred thing that shouldn't step outside its circle. It was hard for us to work together then. We think either people have forgotten or they have grown up by now, so we can make a second foray into that place where she and I are together, making music... simply that. It's not like I'm some wondrous, mystic prince from the rock-'n'-roll world dabbling in strange music with this exotic, Oriental dragon lady, which was the picture projected by the press before."

PLAYBOY: "Some people have accused you of playing to the media. First you become a recluse, then you talk selectively to the press because you have a new album coming out."

LENNON: "That's ridiculous. People always said John and Yoko would do anything for the publicity. In the Newsweek article," (September 29, 1980) "it says the reporter asked us, 'Why did you go underground?' Well, she never asked it that way and I didn't go underground. I just stopped talking to the press. It got to be pretty funny. I was calling myself Greta Hughes or Howard Garbo through that period. But still the gossip items never stopped. We never stopped being in the press, but there seemed to be more written about us when we weren't talking to the press than when we were."

PLAYBOY: "How do you feel about all the negative press that's been directed through the years at Yoko, your 'dragon lady,' as you put it?"

LENNON: "We are both sensitive people and we were hurt a lot by it. I mean, we couldn't understand it. When you're in love, when somebody says something like, 'How can you be with that woman?' you say, 'What do you mean? I am with this goddess of love, the fulfillment of my whole life. Why are you saying this? Why do you want to throw a rock at her or punish me for being in love with her?' Our love helped us survive it, but some of it was

pretty violent. There were a few times when we nearly went under, but we managed to survive and here we are." (looks upward) "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

PLAYBOY: "But what about the charge that John Lennon is under Yoko's spell, under her control?"

LENNON: "Well, that's rubbish, you know. Nobody controls me. I'm uncontrollable. The only one who controls me is me, and that's just barely possible."

PLAYBOY: "Still, many people believe it."

LENNON: "Listen, if somebody's gonna impress me, whether it be a Maharishi or a Yoko Ono, there comes a point when the emperor has no clothes. There comes a point when I will see. So for all you folks out there who think that I'm having the wool pulled over my eyes, well, that's an insult to me. Not that you think less of Yoko, because that's your problem. What I think of her is what counts! Because... fuck you, brother and sister... you don't know what's happening. I'm not here for you. I'm here for me and her and the baby!"

ONO: "Of course, it's a total insult to me..."

LENNON: "Well, you're always insulted, my dear wife. It's natural..."

ONO: "Why should I bother to control anybody?"

LENNON: "She doesn't need me."

ONO: "I have my own life, you know."

LENNON: "She doesn't need a Beatle. Who needs a Beatle?"

ONO: "Do people think I'm that much of a con? John lasted two months with the Maharishi. Two months. I must be the biggest con in the world, because I've been with him 13 years."

LENNON: "But people do say that."

PLAYBOY: "That's our point. Why?"

LENNON: "They want to hold on to something they never had in the first place. Anybody who claims to have some interest in me as an individual artist or even as part of the Beatles has absolutely misunderstood everything I ever said if they can't see why I'm with Yoko. And if they can't see that, they don't see anything. They're just jacking off to... it could be anybody. Mick Jagger or somebody else. Let them go jack off to Mick Jagger, OK? I don't need it."

PLAYBOY: "He'll appreciate that."

LENNON: "I absolutely don't need it. Let them chase Wings. Just forget about me. If that's what you want, go after Paul or Mick. I ain't here for that. If that's not apparent in my past, I'm saying it in black and green, next to all the tits and asses on page 196. Go play with the other boys. Don't bother me. Go play with the Rolling Wings."

PLAYBOY: "Do you..."

LENNON: "No, wait a minute. Let's stay with this a second; sometimes I can't let go of it." (He is on his feet, climbing up the refrigerator) "Nobody ever said anything about Paul's having a spell on me or my having one on Paul! They never thought that was abnormal in those days, two guys together, or four guys together! Why didn't they ever say, 'How come those guys don't split up? I mean, what's going on backstage? What is this Paul and John business? How can they be together so long?' We spent more time together in the early days than John and Yoko: the four of us sleeping in the same room, practically in the same bed, in the same truck, living together night and day, eating, shitting and pissing together! All right? Doing everything together! Nobody said a damn thing about being under a spell. Maybe they said we were under the spell of Brian Epstein or George Martin." (the Beatles' first manager and producer, respectively) "There's always somebody who has to be doing something to you. You know, they're congratulating the Stones on being together 112 years. Whoooopee! At least Charlie and Bill still got their families. In the Eighties, they'll be asking, 'Why are those guys still together? Can't they hack it on their own? Why do they have to be surrounded by a gang? Is the little leader scared somebody's gonna knife him in the back?' That's gonna be the question. That's-a-gonna be the question! They're gonna look back at the Beatles and the Stones and all those guys as relics. The days when those bands were just all men will be on the newsreels, you know. They will be showing pictures of the guy with lipstick wriggling his ass and the four guys with the evil black make-up on their eyes trying to look raunchy. That's gonna be the joke in the future, not a couple singing together or living and working together. It's all right when you're 16, 17, 18 to have male companions and idols, OK? It's tribal and it's gang and it's fine. But when it continues and you're still doing it when you're 40, that means you're still 16 in the head."

PLAYBOY: "Let's start at the beginning. Tell us the story of how the wondrous mystic prince and the exotic Oriental dragon lady met."

LENNON: "It was in 1966 in England. I'd been told about this 'event'... this Japanese avant-garde artist coming from America. I was looking around the gallery and I saw this ladder and climbed up and got a look in this spyglass on the top of the ladder... you feel like a fool... and it just said, 'Yes.' Now, at the time, all the avant-garde was smash the piano with a hammer and break the sculpture and anti-, anti-, anti-, anti-, anti. It was all boring negative crap, you know. And just that Yes made me stay in a gallery full of apples and nails. There was a sign that said, Hammer A Nail In, so I said, 'Can I hammer a nail in?' But Yoko said no, because the show wasn't opening until the next day. But the owner came up and whispered to her, 'Let him hammer a nail in. You know, he's a millionaire. He might buy it.' And so there was this little conference, and finally she said, 'OK, you can hammer a nail in for five shillings.' So smartass says, 'Well, I'll give you an imaginary five shillings and hammer an imaginary nail in.' And that's when we really met. That's when we locked eyes and she got it and I got it and, as they say in all the interviews we do, the rest is history."

PLAYBOY: "What happened next?"

LENNON: "Of course, I was a Beatle, but things had begun to change. In 1966, just before we met, I went to Almeria, Spain, to make the movie 'How I Won the War.' It did me a lot of good to get away. I was there six weeks. I wrote 'Strawberry Fields Forever' there, by the way. It gave me time to think on my own, away from the others. From then on, I was looking for somewhere to go, but I didn't have the nerve to really step out on the boat by myself and push it off. But when I fell in love with Yoko, I knew, My God, this is different from anything I've ever known. This is something other. This is more than a hit record, more than gold, more than everything. It is indescribable."

PLAYBOY: "Were falling in love with Yoko and wanting to leave the Beatles connected?"

LENNON: "As I said, I had already begun to want to leave, but when I met Yoko is like when you meet your first woman. You leave the guys at the bar. You don't go play football anymore. You don't go play snooker or billiards. Maybe some guys do it on Friday night or something, but once I found the woman, the boys became of no interest whatsoever other than being old school friends. 'Those wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine.' We got married three years later, in 1969. That was the end of the boys. And it just so happened that the boys were well known and weren't just local guys at the bar. Everybody got so upset over it. There was a lot of shit thrown at us. A lot of hateful stuff."

ONO: "Even now, I just read that Paul said, 'I understand that he wants to be with her, but why does he have to be with her all the time?'"

LENNON: "Yoko, do you still have to carry that cross? That was years ago."

ONO: "No, no, no. He said it recently. I mean, what happened with John is like, I sort of went to bed with this guy that I liked and suddenly the next morning, I see these three in-laws, standing there."

LENNON: "I've always thought there was this underlying thing in Paul's 'Get Back.' When we were in the studio recording it, every time he sang the line 'Get back to where you once belonged,' he'd look at Yoko."

PLAYBOY: "Are you kidding?"

LENNON: "No. But maybe he'll say I'm paranoid."

(the next portion of the interview took place with Lennon alone)

PLAYBOY: "This may be the time to talk about those 'in-laws,' as Yoko put it. John, you've been asked this a thousand times, but why is it so unthinkable that the Beatles might get back together to make some music?"

LENNON: "Do you want to go back to high school? Why should I go back ten years to provide an illusion for you that I know does not exist? It cannot exist."

PLAYBOY: "Then forget the illusion. What about just to make some great music again? Do you acknowledge that the Beatles made great music?"

LENNON: "Why should the Beatles give more? Didn't they give everything on God's earth for ten years? Didn't they give themselves? You're like the typical sort of love-hate fan who says, 'Thank you for everything you did for us in the Sixties... would you just give me another shot? Just one more miracle?'"

PLAYBOY: "We're not talking about miracles... just good music."

LENNON: "When Rodgers worked with Hart and then worked with Hammerstein, do you think he should have stayed with one instead of working with the other? Should Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis have stayed together because I used to like them together? What is this game of doing things because other people want it? The whole Beatle idea was to do what you want, right? To take your own responsibility."

PLAYBOY: "Alright, but get back to the music itself. You don't agree that the Beatles created the best rock 'n roll that's been produced?"

LENNON: "I don't. The Beatles, you see... I'm too involved in them artistically. I cannot see them objectively. I cannot listen to them objectively. I'm dissatisfied with every record the Beatles ever fucking made. There ain't one of them I wouldn't remake... including all the Beatles records and all my individual ones. So I cannot possibly give you an assessment of what the Beatles are. When I was a Beatle, I thought we were the best fucking group in the god-damned world. And believing that is what made us what we were... whether we call it the best rock 'n roll group or the best pop group or whatever. But you play me those tracks today and I want to remake every damn one of them. There's not a single one... I heard 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' on the radio last night. It's abysmal, you know. The track is just terrible. I mean, it's great, but it wasn't made right, know what I mean? But that's the artistic trip, isn't it? That's why you keep going. But to get back to your original question about the Beatles and their music, the answer is that we did some good stuff and we did some bad stuff."

PLAYBOY: "Many people feel that none of the songs Paul has done alone match the songs he did as a Beatle. Do you honestly feel that any of your songs on the Plastic Ono Band records will have the lasting imprint of 'Eleanor Rigby' or 'Strawberry Fields'?"

LENNON: "'Imagine,' 'Love' and those Plastic Ono Band songs stand up to any song that was written when I was a Beatle. Now, it may take you 20 or 30 years to appreciate that, but the fact is, if you check those songs out, you will see that it is as good as any fucking stuff that was ever done."

PLAYBOY: "It seems as if you're trying to say to the world, 'We were just a good band making some good music,' while a lot of the rest of the world is saying, 'It wasn't just some good music, it was the best.'"

LENNON: "Well, if it was the best, so what?"

PLAYBOY: "So..."

LENNON: "It can never be again! Everyone always talks about a good thing coming to an end, as if life was over. But I'll be 40 when this interview comes out. Paul is 38. Elton John, Bob Dylan... we're all relatively young people. The game isn't over yet. Everyone talks in terms of the last record or the last Beatle concert... but, God willing, there are another 40 years of productivity to go. I'm not judging whether 'I am the Walrus' is

better or worse than 'Imagine.' It is for others to judge. I am doing it. I do. I don't stand back and judge... I do."

PLAYBOY: "You keep saying you don't want to go back ten years, that too much has changed. Don't you ever feel it would be interesting... never mind cosmic, just interesting... to get together, with all your new experiences, and cross your talents?"

LENNON: "Wouldn't it be interesting to take Elvis back to his Sun Records period? I don't know. But I'm content to listen to his Sun Records. I don't want to dig him up out of the grave. The Beatles don't exist and can never exist again. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Richard Starkey could put on a concert... but it can never be the Beatles singing 'Strawberry Fields' or 'I Am The Walrus' again, because we are not in our 20s. We cannot be that again, nor can the people who are listening."

PLAYBOY: "But aren't you the one who is making it too important? What if it were just nostalgic fun? A high school reunion?"

LENNON: "I never went to high school reunions. My thing is, Out of sight, out of mind. That's my attitude toward life. So I don't have any romanticism about any part of my past. I think of it only inasmuch as it gave me pleasure or helped me grow psychologically. That is the only thing that interests me about yesterday. I don't believe in yesterday, by the way. You know I don't believe in yesterday. I am only interested in what I am doing now."

PLAYBOY: "What about the people of your generation, the ones who feel a certain kind of music and spirit died when the Beatles broke up?"

LENNON: "If they didn't understand the Beatles and the Sixties then, what the fuck could we do for them now? Do we have to divide the fish and the loaves for the multitudes again? Do we have to get crucified again? Do we have to do the walking on water again because a whole pile of dummies didn't see it the first time, or didn't believe it when they saw it? You know, that's what they're asking: 'Get off the cross. I didn't understand the first bit yet. Can you do that again?' No way. You can never go home. It doesn't exist."

PLAYBOY: "Do you find that the clamor for a Beatles reunion has died down?"

LENNON: "Well, I heard some Beatles stuff on the radio the other day and I heard 'Green Onion' ...no, 'Glass Onion,' I don't

even know my own songs! I listened to it because it was a rare track..."

PLAYBOY: "That was the one that contributed to the 'Paul McCartney is dead' uproar because of the lyric 'The walrus is Paul.'"

LENNON: "Yeah. That line was a joke, you know. That line was put in partly because I was feeling guilty because I was with Yoko, and I knew I was finally high and dry. In a perverse way, I was sort of saying to Paul, 'Here, have this crumb, have this illusion, have this stroke... because I'm leaving you.' Anyway, it's a song they don't usually play. When a radio station has a Beatles weekend, they usually play the same ten songs... 'A Hard Day's Night,' 'Help!,' 'Yesterday,' 'Something,' 'Let It Be' ...you know, there's all that wealth of material, but we hear only ten songs. So the deejay says, 'I want to thank John, Paul, George and Ringo for not getting back together and spoiling a good thing.' I thought it was a good sign. Maybe people are catching on."

PLAYBOY: "Aside from the millions you've been offered for a reunion concert, how did you feel about producer Lorne Michaels' generous offer of $3200 for appearing together on 'Saturday Night Live' a few years ago?"

LENNON: "Oh, yeah. Paul and I were together watching that show. He was visiting us at our place in the Dakota. We were watching it and almost went down to the studio, just as a gag. We nearly got into a cab, but we were actually too tired."

PLAYBOY: "How did you and Paul happen to be watching TV together?"

LENNON: "That was a period when Paul just kept turning up at our door with a guitar. I would let him in, but finally I said to him, 'Please call before you come over. It's not 1956 and turning up at the door isn't the same anymore. You know, just give me a ring.' He was upset by that, but I didn't mean it badly. I just meant that I was taking care of a baby all day and some guy turns up at the door... But, anyway, back on that night, he and Linda walked in and he and I were just sitting there, watching the show, and we went, 'Ha-ha, wouldn't it be funny if we went down?' but we didn't."

PLAYBOY: "Was that the last time you saw Paul?"

LENNON: "Yes, but I didn't mean it like that."

PLAYBOY: "We're asking because there's always a lot of speculation about whether the Fab Four are dreaded enemies or

the best of friends."

LENNON: "We're neither. I haven't seen any of the Beatles for I don't know how much time. Somebody asked me what I thought of Paul's last album and I made some remark like, I thought he was depressed and sad. But then I realized I hadn't listened to the whole damn thing. I heard one track... the hit 'Coming Up,' which I thought was a good piece of work. Then I heard something else that sounded like he was depressed. But I don't follow their work. I don't follow Wings, you know. I don't give a shit what Wings is doing, or what George's new album is doing, or what Ringo is doing. I'm not interested, no more than I am in what Elton John or Bob Dylan is doing. It's not callousness, it's just that I'm too busy living my own life to be following what other people are doing, whether they're the Beatles or guys I went to college with or people I had intense relationships with before I met the Beatles."

PLAYBOY: "Besides 'Coming Up,' what do you think of Paul's work since he left the Beatles?"

LENNON: "I kind of admire the way Paul started back from scratch, forming a new band and playing in small dance halls, because that's what he wanted to do with the Beatles... he wanted us to go back to the dance halls and experience that again. But I didn't. That was one of the problems, in a way, that he wanted to relive it all or something... I don't know what it was. But I kind of admire the way he got off his pedestal. Now he's back on it again, but I mean, he did what he wanted to do. That's fine, but it's just not what I wanted to do."

PLAYBOY: "What about the music?"

LENNON: "'The Long and Winding Road' was the last gasp from him. Although I really haven't listened."

PLAYBOY: "You say you haven't listened to Paul's work and haven't really talked to him since that night in your apartment..."

LENNON: "Really talked to him, no, that's the operative word. I haven't really talked to him in ten years. Because I haven't spent time with him. I've been doing other things and so has he. You know, he's got 25 kids and about 20,000,000 records out. How can he spend time talking? He's always working."

PLAYBOY: "Then let's talk about the work you did together. Generally speaking, what did each of you contribute to the Lennon-McCartney songwriting team?"

LENNON: "Well, you could say that he provided a lightness, an optimism, while I would always go for the sadness, the discords,

a certain bluesy edge. There was a period when I thought I didn't write melodies, that Paul wrote those and I just wrote straight, shouting rock 'n roll. But, of course, when I think of some of my own songs... 'In My Life' or some of the early stuff... 'This Boy.' I was writing melody with the best of them. Paul had a lot of training, could play a lot of instruments. He'd say, 'Well, why don't you change that there? You've done that note 50 times in the song.' You know, I'll grab a note and ram it home. Then again, I'd be the one to figure out where to go with a song... a story that Paul would start. In a lot of the songs, my stuff is the middle-eight, the bridge."

PLAYBOY: "For example?"

LENNON: "Take 'Michelle.' Paul and I were staying somewhere, and he walked in and hummed the first few bars, with the words, you know-- (sings verse of 'Michelle') and he says, 'Where do I go from here?' I'd been listening to blues singer Nina Simone, who did something like 'I love you!' in one of her songs and that made me think of the middle-eight for 'Michelle.' (sings) 'I love you, I love you, I lo-ove you...'"

PLAYBOY: "What was the difference in terms of lyrics?"

LENNON: "I always had an easier time with lyrics, though Paul is quite a capable lyricist who doesn't think he is. So he doesn't go for it. Rather than face the problem, he would avoid it. 'Hey Jude' is a damn good set of lyrics. I made no contribution to the lyrics there. And a couple of lines he has come up with show indications of a good lyricist. But he just hasn't taken it anywhere. Still, in the early days, we didn't care about lyrics as long as the song had some vague theme... she loves you, he loves him, they all love each other. It was the hook, line and sound we were going for. That's still my attitude, but I can't leave lyrics alone. I have to make them make sense apart from the songs."

PLAYBOY: "What's an example of a lyric you and Paul worked on together?"

LENNON: "In 'We Can Work It Out,' Paul did the first half, I did the middle-eight. But you've got Paul writing, 'We can work it out/We can work it out' --real optimistic, y' know, and me, impatient: 'Life is very short and there's no time/For fussing and fighting, my friend....'"

PLAYBOY: "Paul tells the story and John philosophizes."

LENNON: "Sure. Well, I was always like that, you know. I was like that before the Beatles and after the Beatles. I always asked why people did things and why society was like it was. I didn't

just accept it for what it was apparently doing. I always looked below the surface."

PLAYBOY: "When you talk about working together on a single lyric like 'We Can Work It Out,' it suggests that you and Paul worked a lot more closely than you've admitted in the past. Haven't you said that you wrote most of your songs separately, despite putting both of your names on them?"

LENNON: "Yeah, I was lying. (laughs) It was when I felt resentful, so I felt that we did everything apart. But, actually, a lot of the songs we did eyeball to eyeball."

PLAYBOY: "But many of them were done apart, weren't they?

LENNON: "Yeah. 'Sgt. Pepper' was Paul's idea, and I remember he worked on it a lot and suddenly called me to go into the studio, said it was time to write some songs. On 'Pepper,' under the pressure of only ten days, I managed to come up with 'Lucy in the Sky' and 'Day in the Life.' We weren't communicating enough, you see. And later on, that's why I got resentful about all that stuff. But now I understand that it was just the same competitive game going on."

PLAYBOY: "But the competitive game was good for you, wasn't it?"

LENNON: "In the early days. We'd make a record in 12 hours or something; they would want a single every three months and we'd have to write it in a hotel room or in a van. So the cooperation was functional as well as musical."

PLAYBOY: "Don't you think that cooperation, that magic between you, is something you've missed in your work since?"

LENNON: "I never actually felt a loss. I don't want it to sound negative, like I didn't need Paul, because when he was there, obviously, it worked. But I can't... it's easier to say what I gave to him than what he gave to me. And he'd say the same."

PLAYBOY: "Just a quick aside, but while we're on the subject of lyrics and your resentment of Paul, what made you write 'How Do You Sleep?,' which contains lyrics such as 'Those freaks was right when they said you was dead' and 'The only thing you done was Yesterday/And since you've gone, you're just Another Day'?"

LENNON: (smiles) "You know, I wasn't really feeling that vicious at the time. But I was using my resentment toward Paul to create a song, let's put it that way. He saw that it pointedly refers to him, and people kept hounding him about it. But, you know, there were a few digs on his album before mine. He's so obscure other

people didn't notice them, but I heard them. I thought, Well, I'm not obscure, I just get right down to the nitty-gritty. So he'd done it his way and I did it mine. But as to the line you quoted, yeah, I think Paul died creatively, in a way."

PLAYBOY: "That's what we were getting at: You say that what you've done since the Beatles stands up well, but isn't it possible that with all of you, it's been a case of the creative whole being greater than the parts?"

LENNON: "I don't know whether this will gel for you: When the Beatles played in America for the first time, they played pure craftsmanship. Meaning they were already old hands. The jism had gone out of the performances a long time ago. In the same respect, the songwriting creativity had left Paul and me in the mid-Sixties. When we wrote together in the early days, it was like the beginning of a relationship. Lots of energy. In the 'Sgt. Pepper'- 'Abbey Road' period, the relationship had matured. Maybe had we gone on together, more interesting things would have come, but it couldn't have been the same."

PLAYBOY: "Let's move on to Ringo. What's your opinion of him musically?"

LENNON: "Ringo was a star in his own right in Liverpool before we even met. He was a professional drummer who sang and performed and had Ringo Starr-time and he was in one of the top groups in Britain but especially in Liverpool before we even had a drummer. So Ringo's talent would have come out one way or the other as something or other. I don't know what he would have ended up as, but whatever that spark is in Ringo that we all know but can't put our finger on... whether it is acting, drumming or singing I don't know... there is something in him that is projectable and he would have surfaced with or without the Beatles. Ringo is a damn good drummer. He is not technically good, but I think Ringo's drumming is underrated the same way Paul's bass playing is underrated. Paul was one of the most innovative bass players ever. And half the stuff that is going on now is directly ripped off from his Beatles period. He is an egomaniac about everything else about himself, but his bass playing he was always a bit coy about. I think Paul and Ringo stand up with any of the rock musicians. Not technically great... none of us are technical musicians. None of us could read music. None of us can write it. But as pure musicians, as inspired humans to make the noise, they are as good as anybody."

PLAYBOY: "How about George's solo music?"

LENNON: "I think 'All Things Must Pass' was all right. It just went on too long."

PLAYBOY: "How did you feel about the lawsuit George lost that claimed the music to 'My Sweet Lord' is a rip-off of the Shirelles' hit 'He's So Fine?'"

LENNON: "Well, he walked right into it. He knew what he was doing."

PLAYBOY: "Are you saying he consciously plagiarized the song?"

LENNON: "He must have known, you know. He's smarter than that. It's irrelevant, actually... only on a monetary level does it matter. He could have changed a couple of bars in that song and nobody could ever have touched him, but he just let it go and paid the price. Maybe he thought God would just sort of let him off."

(At presstime, the court has found Harrison guilty of 'subconscious' plagiarism but has not yet ruled on damages.)

PLAYBOY: "You actually haven't mentioned George much in this interview."

LENNON: "Well, I was hurt by George's book, 'I, Me, Mine' ...so this message will go to him. He put a book out privately on his life that, by glaring omission, says that my influence on his life is absolutely zilch and nil. In his book, which is purportedly this clarity of vision of his influence on each song he wrote, he remembers every two-bit sax player or guitarist he met in subsequent years. I'm not in the book."

PLAYBOY: "Why?"

LENNON: "Because George's relationship with me was one of young follower and older guy. He's three or four years younger than me. It's a love/hate relationship and I think George still bears resentment toward me for being a daddy who left home. He would not agree with this, but that's my feeling about it. I was just hurt. I was just left out, as if I didn't exist. I don't want to be that egomaniacal, but he was like a disciple of mine when we started. I was already an art student when Paul and George were still in grammar school." (equivalent to high school in the U.S.) "There is a vast difference between being in high school and being in college and I was already in college and already had sexual relationships, already drank and did a lot of things like that. When George was a kid, he used to follow me and my first girlfriend, Cynthia.. who became my wife... around. We'd come out of art school and he'd be hovering around like those kids at the gate of the Dakota now. I remember the day he called to ask for help on 'Taxman,' one of his bigger songs. I threw in a few one-liners to help the song along, because that's what he asked

for. He came to me because he couldn't go to Paul, because Paul wouldn't have helped him at that period. I didn't want to do it. I thought, Oh, no, don't tell me I have to work on George's stuff. It's enough doing my own and Paul's. But because I loved him and I didn't want to hurt him when he called me that afternoon and said, 'Will you help me with this song?' I just sort of bit my tongue and said OK. It had been John and Paul so long, he'd been left out because he hadn't been a songwriter up until then. As a singer, we allowed him only one track on each album. If you listen to the Beatles' first albums, the English versions, he gets a single track. The songs he and Ringo sang at first were the songs that used to be part of my repertoire in the dance halls. I used to pick songs for them from my repertoire... the easier ones to sing. So I am slightly resentful of George's book. But don't get me wrong. I still love those guys. The Beatles are over, but John, Paul, George and Ringo go on."

PLAYBOY: "Didn't all four Beatles work on a song you wrote for Ringo in 1973?"

LENNON: "'I'm the Greatest.' It was the Muhammad Ali line, of course. It was perfect for Ringo to sing. If I said, 'I'm the greatest,' they'd all take it so seriously. No one would get upset with Ringo singing it."

PLAYBOY: "Did you enjoy playing with George and Ringo again?"

LENNON: "Yeah, except when George and Billy Preston started saying, 'Let's form a group. Let's form a group.' I was embarrassed when George kept asking me. He was just enjoying the session and the spirit was very good, but I was with Yoko, you know. We took time out from what we were doing. The very fact that they would imagine I would form a male group without Yoko! It was still in their minds..."

PLAYBOY: "Just to finish your favorite subject, what about the suggestion that the four of you put aside your personal feelings and regroup to give a mammoth concert for charity, some sort of giant benefit?"

LENNON: "I don't want to have anything to do with benefits. I have been benefited to death."

PLAYBOY: "Why?"

LENNON: "Because they're always rip-offs. I haven't performed for personal gain since 1966, when the Beatles last performed. Every concert since then, Yoko and I did for specific charities, except for a Toronto thing that was a rock 'n roll revival. Every

one of them was a mess or a rip-off. So now we give money to who we want. You've heard of tithing?"

PLAYBOY: "That's when you give away a fixed percentage of your income."

LENNON: "Right. I am just going to do it privately. I am not going to get locked into that business of saving the world on stage. The show is always a mess and the artist always comes off badly."

(...continued)

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